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# 2 Belarusian Officials Expelled From Paralympics for Russian Flag Protest

September 09, 2016




Two Belarusian officials have been expelled from the Paralympic Games after carrying the Russian flag at the competition's opening ceremony.

The International Paralympic Committee (IPC) stripped the officials of their accreditation, labeling the decision to carry the flag as a “political protest.” While the IPC did not name the official who carried the Russian tricolor, he has been identified by Belarusian state media as Andrei Fomochkin, director of the Republican Center of Olympic training for Athletics in Belarus.

Head of the Belarusian Paralympic Committee, Oleg Shepel, confirmed that a second official has also been stripped of their accreditation, but did not give their name.

"The IPC will be speaking to National Paralympic Committee of Belarus this morning to remind them that political protests are forbidden at the Paralympic Games," the IPC said in a statement. They confirmed that the Belarusian athletes would not be punished.

Fomochkin unfurled the Russian tricolor as the team entered Rio de Janeiro’s Maracana Stadium on Wednesday evening, but the flag was quickly confiscated by event officials.

The gesture was a protest against the Russian Paralympic team's exclusion from the Games by the IPC, who banned the athletes following reports of state-sponsored doping.

Fomochkin's action has been praised by both Belarusian and Russian governments.

“Our team member behaved as a true comrade and real man,” said Dmitry Mironchik, spokesperson of the Belarusian Foreign Ministry. “
If we need to answer for such actions,
we will respond.”

“He [Fomochkin] remembered us at this difficult time,” head of Russia's Paralympic Committee Vladimir Lukin said. “Belarusians thought about the closest country to them, about Russia. We won't forget this."

The IPC decision to suspend Russia from the Games has caused widespread controversy in Russia and abroad, with top Russian officials calling it “cruel and inhumane” and "politically motivated."

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